Chapter 10: The new Democrat pro-war paradigm and Syria

A growing restlessness at home that saw no end in sight to the US wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, which gave rise to a war weary sentiment that insisted a complete pullout of US forces from the region as quickly as possible. Americans became desperate for a change in US foreign policy and during the 2008 presidential election, Barack Obama presented a platform to the American public that revolved around bringing troops home, and moving forward with a foreign policy that would depart with direct US intervention in foreign conflict. Obama promised to withdraw US troops from Afghanistan and Iraq and also repair damaged US foreign relations which occurred as a result of previous foreign policy. He also stated his intention to restore the multilateral approach of cooperating with international organizations. This platform helped Barack Obama win the 2008 presidential election and in just eight months after he entered office, he would win the Nobel Peace Prize. And by the end of 2011, Obama withdrew US forces from Iraq. However, the Arab Spring in 2011 which provoked widespread protests throughout the Middle East and North Africa would challenge Obama's original platform of US non-intervention overseas. As these protests triggered violent government crackdowns on protesters in Libya and Syria which led to numerous civilian deaths, pressure was put on the Obama administration to intervene in a growing human rights catastrophe. Obama would facilitate the overthrow of Gaddafi from Libya in 2011, despite Libya posing no imminent threat to the United States. NATO forces conducted airstrikes on various Libyan military posts, which caused more civilian casualties and gave rise to more extremism. The Obama administration then asserted regime change in Syria by recognizing the anti-government/anti-Assad rebels as the official governing authority of the country. Meanwhile, ISIS, a terrorist group made up of former Al Qaeda operatives, Iraqi insurgents, and Saddam loyalists, began embarking upon a series of attacks in Iraq and Syria after declaring a worldwide caliphate. Shortly thereafter, they managed to seize large swaths of territory in both nations. This led to US re-engagement, forcing the Obama administration to order airstrikes in Iraq and Syria in order to stop

further destabilization of the region. The growing ISIS threat in Syria led to Russia sending military aid in form of air support in 2015 to back the Assad regime against the Syrian rebels and ISIS. Once again, the Middle East had become a hotbed of violence and terror. Before long, both Libya and Syria would become a humanitarian catastrophe. US foreign policy during the Obama administration, despite its stated goals of pursuing diplomacy and better international relations, did little to resolve the Middle East crisis. The administration would also set the stage for growing US tension with Russia.

In terms of foreign policy during the Trump administration, Bashar al Assad, the president of Syria, was a major point of contention for the United States. In retrospect, the Obama administration had intervened in Syria in 2011, declaring Assad's opposition as the official ruling party of the country before subsequently arming them against the Assad government, setting off a long and blood civil war in the country. This ran concurrent with ISIS's declaration of a worldwide caliphate as they launched incursion into Iraq and Syria. Russia had intervened in the Syrian Civil War in 2015 and began launching strikes on ISIS positions in order to bolster Assad's forces. But Assad would continuously ignore Syria's ceasefire agreement and continues bombing and gassing Ghouta civilians. This put Russia in a difficult position as Syria's ally. Russia, in defense of a key ally in Syria tried to posture themselves as humane by helping the innocent civilians victimized by ISIS, but continuing to help Assad's regime would take a toll on their global reputation. This put Russia in a precarious position, but still nonetheless Russia's involvement helped further cultivate their reputation as a reliable ally. The US was hoping that Russia would back away from Assad and Syria because once that would happen, the United States would be able to assume full influence in the Middle East; something that would officially end the Cold War with Russia. But Russia's continued influence in the Middle East would trigger US intervention in eastern Europe in the hopes of keeping Russia distracted with issues closer to home and away from conflict in the Middle East. People had a misconception about Russia, and a militant aggressive reputation was often conferred upon them, but in reality, they were afraid of the United States. The Korean War is a

good example, when the US went hands-on helping S Korea, while Russia continued its proxy fighting in fear of getting into a direct confrontation with the US. The Syrian conflict was the beginning stages of the democrats' foray down the pro-war rabbit hole.

The Syrian Civil War that began in 2011 had involved numerous inquiries from the United Nations (UN), an entity not to be considered global enforcers. The UN was more of an assessment of situations in different countries. NATO, however, ultimately decides the outcome of geopolitics. The US and Western Europe were pretty much the undisputed leaders of it which—by default—makes them more powerful then the UN. The US disregarded seeking a UN resolution for Iraq before the invasion with no consequences. Who's going to punish US or UK? Regime change decree by the US for Iran and Syria still stands and the US was hoping that once Assad had gathered enough human rights violations, the US would go in and attack Syria and Russia would simply sit by and watch because of reluctance to have their sovereignty permanently aligned with the likes of a Syrian regime that targets children. Once Syria would have been stabilized with Assad out of the picture, the US would have become more assertive with Iran. The way things were going, the outcome looked as though it would have played out similar to the Reagan administration, with Russia ultimately conceding to the US, and the US becoming, once again, the undisputed leader around the Middle East and the world. Trump had so much luck with foreign affairs, getting N. Korea to talk, while Assad had the global reputation as the human rights violator. Trump was in a good position to weaken Russia's position in the Middle East. Prior to Obama's intervention in Syria, republicans like Mitt Romney tried to convey to the the US that Russia was America's number one foe, but at that time the democrats, still very much anti-war, refused to give credence to what Romney was saying. Many of the democrats thought it was pure non-sense that Russia would be America's number one foe. The idea was ultimately passed off as typical GOP war mongering.

After NATO intervened in Libya and Syria, reports about civilian casualties started coming to light. This would in effect set the stage for notions that the democrats and the republicans were a uni-party, united in their view of military hegemony. But in

response, proponents of the military industrial complex began to more assertively highlight the crimes of Assad's regime and Russia's military, while downplaying the casualties inflicted by the US airstrikes. Collateral damage is an unfortunate occurrence in geopolitical and military conflict. So many times, a military attempts to justify its actions that lead to civilian casualties simply as a part of unintended consequences. But leaders know, before any operation, what the probabilities of civilian casualties are and because of this, they have to be held "morally culpable" in some way. In this case, Russia and Syria cannot even attempt to play down the end result. It was known 'plain and simple' that civilians were going to be killed during an operation. What sort of intel would lead any high ranking military official into believing that the enemy personnel located near a marketplace where civilians gather would necessitate an order which would deliver a hailstorm of airstrikes to the area? These human rights violations had gone way too far and something should have been done. During the Obama Administration, the US was ready to declare war on Syria but hadn't taken any significant action, largely due in part to Obama wanting to maintain a peacemaker image typical of democrat politics. This turned out to be another cold war between Russia and the US. As long as Russia continued to back Assad, and the US continued to back the free Syrian army without taking any significant action against the Assad administration, civilian casualties were going to continue to pile up. Meanwhile, the republicans were urging Obama to provide aid to Ukraine against the rebels in eastern Ukraine who were backed by the Russian military. The idea was to keep Russia distracted from Middle East issues.

This Syrian conflict was getting more and more complicated after Turkey had got involved. Turkey had positive relations with Russia, while Erdogan, the president of Turkey, was clearly an unapologetic opportunist. It seemed like he would milk this cow dry. He, at the time, felt justified to take any land where Kurds were situated and many of them found refuge on the Syrian/Turkey border. Turkey has designated the Kurds as a force of terrorism, designating the Kurdish nationalist group called the PKK as a terrorist group. Erdogan remained bent on removing them away from Turkey's borders, even if it required for Turkey's military to

cross over into Syrian territory. But to what extent can Erdogan feel that Kurds were a threat? Can Erdogan also move his military into Northern Iraq based on that? How much land in Syria can he take without returning it to Assad before Russia gives him a warning, and yet Russia and Turkey were on good terms. This added another element to the Syrian situation that just added more confusion.

The Iraq military had already removed a large portion of Kurdish militants from oil rich parts of Northern Iraq and its unknown how much patience Iraq would have with Turkey crossing their borders to go after the Kurds. Erdogan was giving off this imperialist vibe that he would use anything to justify expansion. Iraq had just come off a hard fought battle with ISIS, and were in the process of trying to solidify the government. If Iraq objected to Turkey crossing their border, it wouldn't be long before Erdogan accuses the Iraq government of indirectly aiding PKK activity and terror planning in N. Iraq for which would be carried out in Turkey. This would further justify Erdogan's ambitions. Since Assad had his hands full and was basically a human rights violator at this point, it made no sense for Turkey to return any Syrian land taken from driving out Kurdish militants. But still, it had to raise some red flags for Iraq (even though Iraq was backed by US) that Erdogan might be tempted to do the same in N Iraq if the military was allowed to conduct operations there. It seems like any attack on PKK terrorists in N. Iraq was really no different than going to war against N. Iraq (Kurdistan). If Kurdistan was harboring the PKK, than how could Erdogan make any distinctions between the entire area of Kurdistan, and the PKK? One may have felt that Afrin, part of Syria which was grabbed by Turkey, would have to remain under Turkish military occupation until Assad would be removed from power. Leaving civilians there unprotected would be disastrous for them since Assad had shown no restraint when it came to bombing civilian areas. The problem was that without Russia or US involvement in some way, insurgency uprising would have remained a threat to the civilian population, potentially turning Syria into a Libya type of situation.

The Middle East conflict had become an all out Shiite vs Sunni War and would almost certainly be the absolute center of a global conflict with US/Western Europe on the side of the Sunnis vs Eastern

Europe/China/Russia on the side of the Shiites. While at first glance, the Middle East situation seems confusing with so much going on. However, when you narrow it down to Sunni and Shiite, the inter-connectedness became more apparent. Right now it doesn't look good for Shiite Islam because of its ties to Assad, who was Alawite which was an offshoot of Shia that venerates Ali, the cousin of Muhammad. However, Sunni Islam had ties to ISIS and Al Qaeda.

Syria had been investigated before by the entire international community numerous times. Intelligence agencies from many countries had evidence and still has evidence that Assad was behind the chemical attacks. The OPCW was usually pretty reliable on inspection. It was the same organization that investigated Saddam's Iraq for weapons of mass destruction and found nothing. Its pretty clear that Syria launched chemical attacks against civilians. However, ISIS's presence and simultaneous use of chemical weapons against civilians allows for Syria to apply plausible deniability.

Initially, Trump, following his election, had the international backing and moral high ground over Assad and anyone who aligned themselves with him. Maybe there was some confirmation bias involved since investigations do tend suffer from this when gathering evidence, meaning they would throw out evidence that could lead to exoneration as opposed to evidence that would lead to implication of someone they were initially against and moreso someone who had a certain reputation. There was a likelihood that Assad did use gas in 2013 during the Obama Administration, as that was heavily investigated and confirmed by most of the international community, not just Israel's allies. Russia even agreed upon a deal that would reduce Syria's chemical weapons. After that, though, it was possible that subsequent attacks were carried out by ISIS knowing that knowledge of Assad's previous actions using chemical weapons would be parlayed into future investigations having a certain amount of confirmation bias that would implicate Assad, no matter if he did it or not. Remember, ISIS did not go to Syria help the opposition. ISIS declared a worldwide caliphate and was going destroy everyone who didn't bow down to their brand of Islam (Sharia Law). They were just as much against Assad as they were against the Syrian people and had targeted and killed lots of

civilians in Syria without flinching an eye. One thing was for sure, there hadn't been as strong of an investigation of ISIS's involvement in these chemical weapons attack as there had been an investigation of Assad's involvement.

Slowly it became more apparent that Russia was not the power it has often been made out to be and was more afraid of the US than the US was afraid of Russia. One could have gathered that even back during the Korean war when US went troops on the ground while Russia stayed proxy. Besides, Russia was too poor to fund a war against the US and that's probably why they were using other means to disrupt the US. Russia was trying to stay out of Israel's conflict with Iran, however, it wasn't clear if Russia would hand over control of the air defense system to Syria. If that happened, it would have been easier for Iran to make a deal with Assad to use that defense system against Israeli fighter jets flying near Iran military bases in Syria.

Still and all, Russia was just not a country the US wanted to associate with in any way. They outrank all other nations when it comes to possibly being able to challenge US military, economic, and political standing in the world and would always be the number one focus of US intelligence/investigation. They were going no holds barred in ripping the US apart socially by infiltrating US institutions via spying, fake news social media postings, hacking, etc. Putin was a former KGB, so he was deeply involved in this covert form of attack. The US did not have the proper infrastructure against this barrage of Russian hackers/spies. It also didn't help that being anti-American was fostered by the left when Trump was president which was a dangerous prospect for the country, seeing that there were so many young impressionable disgruntled young men who want to leave a mark on this world by doing something destructively noteworthy.

In hindsight, Russia, through aid and diplomacy, was gaining influence throughout the entire Middle East. They were making friends with everyone, all sides of the conflict. It was very strategic on their part and would certainly change their economic future and later serve as a buffer against US sanctions that would be later applied after Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022. The danger of Russia's growing influence in the Middle East was that if they

manage to lure Saudi Arabia away from the United States, it would usher in a shift in the world order with their country at the helm, with maybe China second, and the US third in terms of national military/economic power. Russia was doing this without even having to let Middle Eastern refugees stay in their country. So for Russia, this was a win/win scenario. US ability to control its destiny and make decisions was credited in large part to its stature relative to other countries. When that dynamic changes, the country's self determination would be limited to approval and oversight from the greater power. For most people, this was not a big deal because the central idea of life was to live and let live. However, these shifts don't just stop, they keep going and its clear that Russia won't be satisfied until the US would be completely subjugated to them or least diminished enough to keep Russian leaders from fearing US policy regarding NATO's expansion. Ultimately, status is not important if everyone is just trying to stay within their domain and not trying to oppress or expand, but these days alot of countries were feeling justified, especially in terms of what the US may have opened the door for others to do.

Saudi Arabia faced international scrutiny when a US resident, Jamal Khashoggi, was extrajudicially murdered by Saudi officials in the Saudi consulate in Turkey. It is important to note that opposition to government in that part of the world was often backed by violence, assassinations, coup attempts, etc. So in that sense, it leaves administrations over there on edge when hearing or reading about criticism from those who disagree with policy. It can incite violence very quickly and administration was very aware of that. Khashoggi was planning to publish sensational revelations about Saudi war crimes in Yemen.

This dynamic, however, is a bit different in civilized, European based society right now because we don't hear much about coup attempts or violent overthrow, so our administrative bodies don't get as rattled when members of the population express disagreement with policy. That could change in the post Jan-6 world, with the US cracking down on dissent, fearing that hostile rhetoric may imply violent action. Not only that, with Russia having infiltrated US democracy the way they did with the election, and China implanting chips into hardware for spying purposes, US

administration's attitude to anti-government rhetoric may become even more assertive to prevent this type of covert non-violent aggression by China and Russia from evolving into something that could permanently cripple US democratic values.

Meanwhile, Iran had been firing cruise missiles at Saudi oil facilities. Oil facilities should always have radar because the best way to win any war was to cut off your enemy's access to oil and as long as there was aggression in the world, the possibility of such an attack as a first objective for any hostile nation had to be considered. Iran was denying responsibility. However, they've threatened to cut off Saudi oil supply/transport logistics numerous times in the past. Such threats wouldn't help Iran's believability here. For the West, Saudi, and Israel, Iran was the only obstacle to mid-east stability as they empower and fund almost all antagonism to Israel's existence. If anyone should desire Middle East peace, they would have to also desire some sort of strategy regarding how to deal effectively with Iran. Since Khomeini came to power in the late 70's, the US had consistently been determined not to compromise with Iran, at least until Obama. Lets say the Houthis, an Iranian proxy, did actually carry out the attack on Saudi's oil facilities, it still links back to Iran, since Iran also supplies and aids the Houthi rebels in Yemen. Of course, US always had to calculate how Russia would respond in the case of launching any attack against Iran, which is why the US was adamant about fomenting a war in eastern Europe. Because lets face it, the most important factor for the US in the Middle East was their relationship with Saudi Arabia. However, the US had to be careful not to give off the impression of taking orders from the Saudis, but at the same time let the Saudis know that the US was in their corner as a major ally. No one can expect any mid-east peace as long as Iran continues its proxy endeavors to remove the state of Israel.

In terms of Iran or any country's determination to develop a nuclear arsenal, there seems to be no way to circumvent any country's efforts to develop itself in that manner. There would be no way to stop Iran from developing its nuclear arsenal without the use of force, but there is no way to justify attacking on those grounds when other countries had successfully developed their nuclear arsenal without resistance. Attacking simply on the

grounds of fear would create a dangerous ripple effect and set a global precedent that makes preemptive strikes from fear alone justifiable. Yes, while its' a scary thought of what could happen if Iran had nuclear weapons, but that fear wouldn't justify a preemptive based solely on that. The only to way implicate and act against Iran for its nuclear development would be for the UN to designate Hezbollah as a terror group. If that happens, all of Hezbollah's affiliates would inherit that same status, including Iran. In that case Iran would face regime change in the country and its threat to mid-east peace would effectively end. The way Iran had been acting in terms of its aggression towards Saudi Arabia and Israel leads to Iran actually working against itself, because now any action against Iran doesn't have to revolve around the nuclear aspect, but simply around its hostility to the existence of globally recognized nation states like Israel, which would in itself give justification for a military response against Iran, which would then provide an avenue for that same military response to also go ahead and stop its nuclear development. NATO's nuclear deterrence policy allows NATO countries to develop nuclear weapons as a deterrence to non-NATO countries who were looking to develop them. However, international right to self determination gives a nation or people the right to develop itself politically and nationally based on principles of equal rights and opportunity. So, there was some conflict between NATO's deterrence policy and international policy of right to self determination. With Israel, FDR's lend-lease policy comes into play that allows the US to supply any nation whose defense directly relates to the US's defense, which therefore automatically makes NATO's nuclear deterrence policy applicable with regard to Israel's nuclear weapons stockpile compared to Iran's.

In 2019, Putin had offered to sell S-400 missiles to Saudi Arabia in order to help their bolster defenses. Russia was literally playing both sides of the conflict in open view. Russia gave Syria the same missiles to possibly ward off Israeli attacks on Syrian territory targeting Iran bases, which was sort of a defacto Russia/Iran alliance against Israel. Russia and Iran were normally strategic allies, but now Russia was offering that same defense to an enemy of Iran. We were beginning to see why Middle East nations don't

want outside influence. The ones who often tout an alliance with one nation could just as easy tout an alliance with an enemy of that nation, and then simply play both sides. It's almost as if Russia was insulting the intelligence of Muslim countries. It's like England—they provide aid to the Palestinians in Gaza and at the same time provide arms support to Israel. That makes this situation all the more disconcerting. If the Saudis accept Russia's offer, would the US rebuke Saudi Arabia the way they did Turkey after Turkey bought the Russian Missiles? There was a push to remove Turkey from NATO because of that. It is clear that the Saudis had more clout in terms of its independent decision making, however, there was no way the US would not express a significant measure of disappointment should the Saudis accept Russia's assistance. Russia had been courting Saudi Arabia for years and was probably the biggest threat to the United States in terms of the US's status in the world in relation to other nations. Russia's ultimate goal was to lure Saudi Arabia away from both the United States and the US dollar.

In late 2019, the Trump administration, leading up to the assassination of Iranian General Solemani, had wanted to act against Iran after the missile strike on Saudi oil facilities, but Iran warned the US on retaliation as it continued to deny any role in the attack. US intel had evidence that the attacks originated from Iran, but the political climate in the US was such that gathering support for a military operation against Iran was untenable. The democrats at this time was adamant against any policy that could lure the US into another major conflict. But the US military was afraid that if the US did not retaliate on behalf of Saudi Arabia, then Russian diplomatic efforts with Saudi Arabia would be able to use that lack of action on their part to their advantage in their attempts to steer Saudi Arabia away from the United States. The Russians would be able to present the idea to Saudi Arabia that the US was not viable enough to directly confront the enemies of its allies. It's unlikely that Russia could offer to aid Saudi Arabia militarily, seeing that Iran is a critical ally of Russia, but they could still nonetheless point to their efforts with Syria as proof that such intervention was a part of Russian foreign policy and an indication of Russia's reliability as a pertinent ally. With Russia courting Saudi Arabia diplomatically, Saudi Arabia ultimately ended up having a lot of clout and leverage,

which put the US in a precarious position. The US would not be able to allow Russia to demonstrate that they were more willing than the United States to cater to the whims of its allies. Russia could easily sever ties with Iran in exchange for close ties with Saudi Arabia. a prospect that would change the current order of the world. Offering the Saudis its missile defense system could be Russia's first step in doing just that.

Russia's ties with Israel and Assad was odd, and it shows that Russia was not really too intent on playing sides accordingly to how everything lines up as far as conflict in the Middle East was concerned. This lack of prudence on Russia's part was how the US could respond to Russia's courtship of Saudi Arabia—by noting to Saudi Arabia how Russia was not concerned about dealing with any particular dynamic that affects the status of their allies. The reason one can gather that Russia would easily throw all of its eggs into Saudi Arabia was because Russia knows that US economic infrastructure was held up solely by the Saudis selling oil for US dollars, which in itself raises the global demand for the currency, which in turn allows the US to continue to borrow money and stimulate the economy. Turning that off would have dire consequences for the US from an economic standpoint, as the US was already in dire straits as far as the national debt was concerned, and we still don't know how sustainable US shale oil is, which was why Saudi-US relations remain important even as the US overtakes Saudi Arabia in Oil exports. Since Saudi Arabia had significant control over OPEC, which sells oil for US dollars, Russia overtaking the US in diplomatic relations with Saudi Arabia would also constitute Russia overtaking any influence the US had on OPEC via Saudi Arabia. OPEC controls almost 80 percent of the world's oil supply. If Saudi Arabia moves away from the US dollar at the request of Russia, its likely that all other member nations would follow suit. To circumvent this, the US could maybe join OPEC and try to exert some influence as a top oil exporter and keep member nations content with selling their oil for US dollars.

Russia did the bulk of the fighting against ISIS. US forces however did real well at locating key individuals. The US places a greater emphasis on the head of organizations as opposed to the body. There was a former ISIS member/Saddam loyalist who came

out and said that these organizations fall apart when the leadership breaks down, and not so much when de-radicalization attempts try to dissuade incoming recruits. The problem though was still the fact that the US invaded Iraq. That decision still raises questions to this day. Much of ISIS's infrastructure was maintained by Saddam's military personnel and disgruntled Iraqi Sunnis who were feeling ostracized by the current Iraqi government. The war in Iraq and not finding those weapons of mass destruction was why ISIS would likely grow another head at some point, with that head stemming mainly from the demographic of disgruntled Sunni minorities/Saddam loyalists in Iraq. They would always be able to use the war in Iraq as justification. Al Qaeda had somewhat distanced itself from ISIS even though ISIS did had remnants of the Al Qaeda of Iraq started by Abu Musab al-Zarqawi. In any case, the only de-radicalization strategy to circumvent a resurgence of ISIS was to work on Iraq's policy toward the Sunni minorities and help the Sunni minorities find some contentment with the Iraqi government, otherwise Jihad would remain a threat to Middle East stability.

The civil war in Syria waged on in 2019 and the battle for a Syrian town pitted Turkey against the Assad Regime. It was only a matter of time before Assad would step in. If Turkey was to become greedy, all of Erdogan's progress in driving the Kurds back outside of and away from that safe radius at the Turkey/Syrian border would become undone. Maybe Erdogan thinks because he was currently cooperating with Russia at the border, he could expand that radius a little further. Still and all, Assad was going to place limits on just how far Turkey can go. The last thing Turkey needed was for the Kurds to gain more military assurance from the Assad regime, and it didn’t help Turkey's cause that they (Turkey) was still backing the anti-Assad rebels. If Erdogan became overzealous, the Kurds would become a greater threat to his administration and country, much greater than Erdogan's current outlook of them as being linked to the PKK(Kurdistan worker's party), an internationally known terrorist group.

Its hard to delineate Erdogan's intentions with the Kurds, whether its to neutralize or genocide. As of 2019, one can say the Kurdish threat to Erdogan was neutralized, especially if he had

control over that small radius between the Turkish/Syrian border. It would not help his cause to feel that he should have the right to follow the Kurds wherever they go, thereby antagonizing his neighbors along the way. If Erdogan was going to believe that every pro-Kurdish group had ties with the PKK, then how can one assume that he was not trying cleanse the Middle East entirely of Kurdish people? There is reason to call it that, but many in the international community think this was the case. His fear was not unfounded. However, from a strategic standpoint, getting too overzealous could provide an impetus for states/regimes to back these PKK offshoots, which would be even more problematic for the internal security of Turkey than the idea of an offshoot of the PKK existing somewhere outside of Turkey but not a threat to Turkey. Erdogan's fears stem from evidence that the YPG in Syria, which led the SDF in the fight against ISIS and the Turkey Backed Syrian rebels, was simply an offshoot of the PKK. The US was aware that the YPG was an offshoot of an internationally known terror group, but helped the YPG anyway due to the growing threat of the ISIS caliphate.

In retrospect, there was no need for Assad to bombard those areas and risk more civilian casualties. The US had already withdrawn from the conflict and the Syrian Democratic forces had already began discourse with Assad about the Kurdish situation. The opposition was effectively neutralized. There was no need to risk more civilian deaths. There was no existential threat to the Assad regime with ISIS defeated, the US withdrawal, and SDF cooperation.

Meanwhile Iran continued to provoke the US, striking US personnel in Iraq via its proxies. Iran, through rebel militias, had carried out rocket attacks for months, prompting the US to deploy more troops to the region. After numerous provocations, Iran's Gen. Soleimani would be killed in a US airstrike at Baghdad airport in early 2020. This was met with widespread condemnation from the democrats, who had been vehemently anti-war throughout Trump's tenure. They were fearful of possible war with Iran. The strike was done as a reprisal to a Shiite militia rocket attack on a US contractor and other US military personnel on an Iraq military base. This was a major strike by the US and would heighten tensions in the region. Gen Soleimani was, according to some, the second

most powerful person in Iran. According to the US, he was planning to attack US diplomats and other US representatives in Iraq. The dynamics between Iran and US had now changed from political/diplomatic to military, similar to how Trump altered the dynamic between North Korea and the United States. In both cases of Iran and North Korea, the democrats and the detractors of President Trump were very sympathetic to both regimes. The era of containment was over and we were seemingly headed for another major conflict in the Middle East. The Trump administration pulled out of the Iran Nuclear deal and applied sanctions against Iran, which in turn may have been a catalyst to Iran increasing its supply of arms to its Shiite militant channels in Yemen and Lebanon through Syria and Iraq. Retaliation could have through its proxy channels. However the US was trying to signal to Iran that any proxy maneuvers by Iran would be met with direct confrontation by the US. Trump decided to strike Iran after a positive meeting with Russia, a meeting which sort of disarmed Russia for the moment.

The anti-war attitude of the democrats when Trump was in office gave off the impression that they were in fact going to be front and center in getting the US military out of these endless wars. This was key in Biden's eventual election. When Biden, shortly thereafter, became hostile in rhetoric towards Russia, many, even myself, were confused because we had the impression that there was going to be a concerted effort to avoid military conflict at almost any cost. It became even more perplexing when many of Biden's supporters who were also vehemently anti-war when Trump was in office, would also jump on this pro-war bandwagon after Biden's election, even entertaining and welcoming the thought of a nuclear war with Russia. It was clear that it was not about being anti-war when it came to the perspective of democrats and leftists. It was simply a game of contrarianism. In 2017, when Trump sent heavy weapons to Ukraine, the left leaning media strongly opposed the idea and thus became anti-Ukraine, publishing reports that Ukraine had a Neo-nazi problem. But when the quid-pro-quo scandal happened in 2019 in which Trump threatened to withhold weapons from Ukraine in exchange for their cooperation in investigating Biden's Burisma ties while he was Vice President, Trump's detractors made a 180 degree turn on Ukraine, becoming in

favor of weaponizing the country and encouraging Ukraine to stand firm against Russia, regardless of any proposals to negotiate. The democrats had lost sight of how the Neo-cons were behind starting a war in Ukraine, and consigned Trump's pro-Putin approach to a pro-Russian GOP narrative that was not consistent with fact or reality. Democrats going down this rabbit hole and unwittingly aligning with the pro-war Neo-conservatives led many to uphold the idea that the democrats and the republicans were a uni-party.

When it came to Iran, there was alot of apprehension on the part of many in the US concerning Iran because the US had a history of military endeavors in the Middle East that did not quite pan out as intended,and in some cases may have even exacerbated problems. There was no way for anyone to expect the US to allow Iran to impose its will in the Middle East, especially when it came to the safety of US personnel. All countries had their red line, and both sides had effectively crossed the other's. When that happens, peace becomes a very difficult thing to conjure up. Much of US antagonism to Iran was in response to Iran's antagonism to US/Israel as Iran was open in their mantra of death to America/death to Israel. The US takes this very seriously. Come to find out, there were Hezbollah networks not just in the Middle East, but also in Latin America and Africa. Iran may could try to further enable Hezbollah's operations in those areas. The world had become a more dangerous place than it already was.

Iran's strategy of plausible deniability, however, had to be taken into consideration. All those attacks on US bases in 2019 could not be undeniably linked to them by other than the fact that the rockets used were also the same rockets used by the Houthis in Yemen. For this reason, Iran had been able to garner sympathy and because of this plausible deniability strategy by Iran, the evidence that the US had for the imminent attack that they were averting by attacking Soleimani directly may not be substantial enough for the already skeptical public sentiment towards the Trump administration. While the US was not the shining moral example because of mistakes in the past up to now, one still had to be vigilant that one's own sentiment isn't playing into the hands of an open enemy to the US. Familiarity breeds contempt, and many Americans were entirely too familiar and frustrated with US policy, but at the same

time, its important not to let the whole "grass greener on the other side" aspect cloud one's greater discernment.

Meanwhile, the Syrian government continued to seem more concerned about territory than they were about civilians. Luckily Russia had relations with both Turkey and Syria, which could in itself restrain Syria from simply launching gas attacks on both the Hayat Tahrir Al Sham (HTA) enclaves and Turkish military without concern for the civilian population. Turkey had remained conciliatory with Russia, even though Russian forces had killed Turkish forces in Syria via friendly fire in the past. For the US to get involved in the conflict, it would mean they would have to fight against the very people whom they were allied with during the Syrian Civil War—the Kurds. Turkey's involvement automatically places the Kurds with Assad in terms of alliance and if the US sides with Turkey against the Kurds, it would continue to raise questions and scrutiny toward US foreign policy. However, even this conundrum doesn't change the dire implication of Assad continuing his operations in Syria. The SDF was made up of not only Kurds, but other Arab militias who may either become pro Assad, or in the more likely sense, join the HTA against Assad and all foreign presence in Syria, but nonetheless accept aid from Turkey.

HTA was originally Al Nusra Front, but broke affiliation with Al Qaeda around 2016 and changed their name. US getting involved would depend on the scope of Turkey's aid towards the rebels and figuring out exactly where the Kurds stand in all of this. For Israel, the decision was easier because the most of the PLA (Palestinian Liberation Army), formerly the military arm of the PLO (an Israel-designated terror organization), was largely situated in Syria to protect the Assad regime. For Israel, a fortifying of the Assad regime raises the likelihood of a confrontation of between Israel and Syria since Syria had promised to reclaim every inch of Syria, which would include the Golan Heights.

ISIS and Hayat Tahrir al-Sham had gained strength in Syria. The difference between HTA and ISIS was that ISIS was operating on declared caliphate, while HTA was largely opposed to foreign influence in Syria, namely the Russians. Some of the Assad rebels who fought in the Syrian civil war were now working for Erdogan as mercenaries in Libya. Subterranean warfare was really the

problem in Syria. ISIS was able to lay siege to large swaths of territory in Iraq and Syria back in 2014 using those tactics. Clearly, airstrikes were not the answer since ISIS was still operating today even after Russian and US ariel intervention. Now, ISIS was using the subterranean warfare to access critical oil and gas reserves. There was no military solution in Syria. Many agree that the UN had to support a pro-Syrian agenda focused on getting aid into the country. This is easier said than done, however. Assad still had to work out tensions with Turkey; tensions which stem from Assad providing refuge to the Kurds and YPG militants, an offshoot of the PKK.

The situation in Syria had gotten out of control. Raising tensions with Turkey would backfire on Assad. After vowing to keep US soldiers in Syria, President Trump decided in October of 2019 to withdraw the remaining US troops from Syria. In recent years up onto that point, the US had been launching airstrikes in Syria and also kept a number ground troops stationed there in the fight against ISIS. One of the US's closest partners during the campaign were the Kurdish fighters, thousands of whom have been killed in Syria since 2014. They were leading a coalition of multi-ethnic fighters called the Syrian Democratic Forces. In 2019, however, Turkey was preparing to launch an offensive in the region to repel the Kurdish presence near Turkey's border. The Kurdish militia serving alongside the US and leading the Syrian Democratic Forces in Syria was known as the YPG, a group that Turkey's president, Recep Erdogan, believes is simply an offshoot of the PKK, a group that both the US and Turkey has designated as a terrorist group. And the fact that the US was allied with the group during the Syrian campaign created a tension between the US and Turkey that became unsustainable. Thus Erdogan made it clear to Trump that Turkey was going to attack the Syrian border regardless of US presence. After a phone call with the Turkish president on this matter, Trump ordered the removal of the remaining 1000 US troops in Syria, and many US soldiers felt as though they were abandoning their closest ally and leaving them to be slaughtered by the Turkish army. The US would later confirm that the Kurdish fighters they cooperated with in Syria were an offshoot of the PKK, a US designated terrorist group. All things considered, the string of treaty violations and

abandonment of partnership obligations conducted by the Trump administration, paved the way for the irreversible loss of trust between the United States and overseas partners. This loss of trust would reach a tipping point during the next administration to take office in Washington D.C.

No country was completely free of domestic militant resistance, and in Syria after the US withdrew their troops and after ISIS was defeated, there was no existential threat to Assad's government. He wanted to eliminate every ounce of contention without realizing that such a prospect was impossible. He continued to act without regard for human civilian life and was on the verge of being charged with war crimes. Not sure how many more civilians the Syrian government had to kill before the international community says enough was enough.

The US would bargain for Turkey to cut ties with Russia and also de-arm themselves of those Russian missiles they currently had. The US was also careful about getting too involved because of the Kurdish issue. Not a problem for Turkey since Germany was now the undisputed leader of the EU. Germany, even under military constraints from WWII, can act militarily to defend a NATO ally. Germany was also the number 1 economy in Europe and had the ability to fund any major conflict. Of course, this was all if Russia launches offensives against Turkey. Russia would not attack a NATO ally. Russia had a lot going for them diplomatically and it would have been surprising if they would let Syria cause them to lose all their international diplomatic gains over the past 2-3 years. However, if Russia could not convince Assad to de-escalate, there could be some major diplomatic consequences for Russia. The concept of over-reaching doesn't seem to apply in military conflict, but yet it had an overt significant implication throughout history.

Turkey was threatening to allow Syrian refugees to go into Europe if NATO didn’t act to protect them from Russian aggression. Russia could be applying plausible deniability about their attacks on Turkish troops. However, another migrant crisis would challenge the stability of some European countries who had experienced a surge in far right violence. Germany, should they intervene, would attack Russia directly especially if the global markets continue to get pounded over the coronavirus lockdowns.

If Germany took the lead on aiding Turkey, they would likely dismiss all WWII NATO constraints and apply full military independence and use their monetary reserves for the adequate military spending needed to resolve the Syrian crisis. The US could help, but would likely not send troops back to Syria to fight alongside Turkey and face a situation where they eventually end up fighting against the Kurds after having helped them in the fight against ISIS. Most of Europe had given Germany the green light to build up their military, and Trump had put considerable pressure on Germany to increase their military spending.

Syria and Russia's justification was that they needed to drive out the terrorists, but killing civilians in the process seemed to defeat that purpose. Germany and Belgium had both confronted Russia about the crisis regarding civilian casualties and could have ended up providing support to Erdogan if Russia and Syria continued to ignore their demands for ceasefire in Idlib.

Notwithstanding, it may have been a bit premature for Erdogan to use coercion to try and get NATO to respond especially with Germany and Belgium already at serious odds with Russia over what was happening in Idlib. Countries don't like to feel they were being coerced into anything and would usually do everything to save face in that regard. Erdogan could have lobbied for more military assistance from the EU and NATO without resorting to coercion. Turkey would not be able to withstand an onslaught from both Syria and Russia's forces who would go to any lengths to reclaim Syrian territory no matter the cost. NATO wouldn't allow ego to keep them from providing the necessary aid to Turkey that would help circumvent more civilian casualties. Idlib was now a humanitarian crisis. Furthermore, it was a good sign that the Kurds were also urging the UN to deal with the situation in Idlib, which could lead to the US jumping back into action if the rest of NATO won't help Turkey. Of course, the US would have to make clear to all that their help was strictly for helping to mend the situation in Idlib and not for helping Turkey go after the the Kurds.

Syria alone would not be able to run roughshod over the Turkish army. They would need substantial Russian support. Erdogan seems like a fearless leader who doesn't pull punches and doesn't make supplications. However, there seems to be a great deal

of opposition within his own administration regarding Syria. Because of that, talks with Russia could have easily led to a solution to the Syria/Turkey conflict. They key issues for Russia during such talks would have been Turkey's ties to the Syrian rebel groups and the HTA, and for Turkey, the key issue during the talks would be Syria's ties to YPG/PKK. There would have had to be some promises made by each side to cut their ties to the respective groups, which is not as easy as it sounds. But judging from the internal conflict within the Turkish administration, Erdogan may likely be advised to compromise in this regard. I doubt he would listen, he seemed intent to using force to keep Syria in check, and not diplomacy. In the event of Syria's lack of care, a red line could have been crossed and lead to a full on Turkish invasion regardless of Russia's presence.

Erdogan's main objective had always been to get the Kurds as far away from Turkey as possible. He could also be doing this to put more pressure on both NATO and the US to side with Turkey. He wants to push the Kurds out of Syria and into Iraq or anywhere where they would not be welcomed. If Syria and Russia would agree on that point, then Turkey would have been willing to compromise with Syria and Russia.

The Hayat Tahrir al Sham(HTA) was the only formidable opposition (in Idlib) to the Assad regime. The SDF had been been in correspondence with the Assad regime and had abandoned the resistance. The Syrian Democratic forces(SDF) were made up of many YPG(PKK offshoot) soldiers, so Turkey was definitely not backing them. There was no information on who these Turkish backed rebels were. There was controversy over this same dynamic when the rebels were being aided by the US during the Syrian civil war. There was a major issue with the US backed Syrian rebels allowing much of that aid to end up in the hands of ISIS. Many of the rebels were either negotiating non-aggression with ISIS or joining them.

Russia's involvement definitely emboldened Assad and kept him from having to answer to an international tribunal for his actions. But Syria was in a precarious position. Israel had been striking Iranian targets in Syria for years. While Syria was trying to stay out of this aggression, it would only take some nudging from

Iran for Syria to completely defend all of its airspace. Syria had high powered Russian anti-aircraft at its disposal and if the Iranians should, in some unfortunate scenario, gain access to the weapons, it could lead to escalation between Syria/Iran/Russia and Israel/US/Turkey After a top Iranian nuclear scientist was assassinated, things were getting nasty. This was a dangerous containment strategy applied by Israel. Aggression only further exacerbates Iran's urgency for nuclear weapons. Sad, its came to this—assassinating non-combatants. Israel, even when Khomeini came to power in the late 70s, remained open to better relations with Iran. However, those days were over. After years of repeated death threats from Iran, Israel was now on the brink of a direct conflict with Iran. Nuclear deterrence was not that easy. Technically any country that fuels its power grid on nuclear energy had the capability of enriching its Uranium by either extracting the necessary amount of U-235 or extracting Plutonium 239 after Uranium 239 beta decays. The knowledge to produce a nuclear bomb was as readily available as harry potter. So where does one draw the line? This was not good because it sets a new precedent in global conflict, where it becomes lawful for non-combatants to be targeted for murder by state-sponsored agencies, even within conflicts where the countries were not officially at war. The scariest thing was that domestic dissidents now had an angle that would provide them plausible deniability if they should decide to orchestrate an event in which these state-sponsored agencies can be designated the scapegoat. Public sentiment was at the moment heavily steered away from trusting these agencies as being in the best interest of the public. This was mainly due to allegations that villainizes them. This assassination of an Iranian nuclear scientist just further exacerbates the lack of trust and opens a Pandora's box. The UN needs to lay down some rules fast before this gets out of hand.

Obama’s intervention in Syria by helping foment a civil war led to a new dynamic between pro-war Neo cons and anti-war democrats. The media would find themselves having to report on Syria in a way that highlights Assad’s terror, but downplays the insidious role of the US in further escalating the conflict. Whereas before when the democrats were usually quick to point out US

military aggression when the operations were backed and supported by the GOP, but now that Obama, a democrat, was conducting continued military interventions, the media had to be sure to keep the focus on the need and justification for the US to remain on the attack. The democrats were heavily pro-Russian back in 2012 because their political opposition was heavily anti-Russian. In fact, this dynamic has a long-standing historical back drop. The red scare back in the 1950s was initiated by a republican senator named Joseph McCarthy and created a movement within the republican framework called McCarthyism. The goal was to go after left wing individuals. It was typical at that time to accuse leftists as having ties to the Russian government. But somewhere during Trump's presidency, this dynamic began to change where left-wingers were now in line with McCarthyism paranoia.

The complexities of the Middle East conflict presents scenarios such as when two sides are fighting alongside each other against a common enemy. This was similar to how the Iran-backed Mahdi army and Al Qaeda of Iraq were fighting together against the US invasion of Iraq. There was no link connecting the Iran -backed Mahdi army group with the Al Qaeda of Iraq militants even though both were launching attacks against US forces. As a result, the Mahdi army was never designated as a terror group by the UN (Al Qaeda was a UN designated terrorist group). Another example were the US-backed forces in Syria who were fighting against Assad and who allowed US weapons to get into the hands of ISIS fighters who were also fighting against Assad. Its complicated mess over there, but groups had to be careful because any evidence of coordination with a UN designated terror group automatically inserts that group as a terror affiliate. Its a deadly program since anyone on that UN designated terror list garners no entitlement to human rights or war policy protections, hence the continuous and ruthless US drone program deployed over there to go after any and all terrorist operatives and links.

The US needed to figure out foreign policy. Obviously, no one should want to support regimes that carry out terror on their own people, but don't make the situation worse. Syria was utter failure for the US. Not only did Assad stay in power, but countless people loss their lives as a result of the Obama administration instigating

civil war and unrest over there. There was a way to enact deterrence on despots and tyrannical or brutal leaders without having to put the inhabitants there in a perilous situation. The Obama administration did the same in Libya and now that place is nothing but a training ground for militants. Officials should let the leaders who violate human rights face a UN tribunal, and not make everyone suffer by turning the country into a war zone of human atrocity. That seems counter intuitive to actually trying to help. Half the time the soldiers don't even know why they're fighting. The US needs to sit down and draw up a foreign policy that at the very least makes some sort of sense and one that keeps civilians in mind. If they're just too ruthless to do it for the sake of civilians, then at least do it for the morale of the soldiers.

There was no deterring Iran and because of the sympathy they garnered from the Democratic Party in the United States after the assassination of Gen. Solemani, Iran would steadily gain more international support. Its likely that they were aware of this, and would simply continue to incite Israel with hostile maneuvers as a result, making Israel look like the aggressor. The same was happening in Gaza, where militants were firing at Israel to provoke an Israeli response and thus garner more international support. In the 2021 Gaza War, the media defined a moral equivalency between Israel and Hamas. Hamas is a US/Israel-designated terror group, but after the 2021 Gaza war in which Hamas would fire 4000 rockets into Israeli territory, the media and the democrats had taken on a very supportive tone by downplaying the nature of the terror group and consigning them to being a defensive entity. Right now, its about funding and greater support for Iran and Hamas, so Israel’s defense sector had to be careful, especially the Mossad.

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